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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Performance of PM Sharon's Government
- [1](#)2. Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media led with the investigation of Elchanan Tenenbaum and the fallout from Maariv's revelations about PM Sharon's alleged connection with Tenenbaum's family.

-In interviews to all TV stations and other media, Sharon reiterated that he had been unaware that Tenenbaum is the former son-in-law of his former business partner Shimon Cohen. Sharon was quoted as saying that Maariv's expose is a "malicious libel." Israel Radio quoted staff members in Sharon's bureau that it could have been a ploy by right-wing elements to thwart his diplomatic moves.

-All media cited strong reactions to Maariv's revelations on the Right and on the Left. Cabinet ministers close to Sharon, such as Ehud Olmert and Limor Livnat, defended Sharon in media interviews and opinion pieces.

-All media reported that the lie detector tests to which Tenenbaum was submitted indicated that he spoke the truth on most questions he was asked.

Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that Stephen Hadley and Elliott Abrams from the White House and William Burns from the State Department will visit Israel next week to continue discussions on Sharon's disengagement plan. Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post quoted National Security Council Spokesman Sean McCormack as saying that the plan has the "potential to be historic." Reporting on talks the Israeli diplomatic team held in Washington with White House and State Department officials, Ha'aretz (Aluf Benn) says that Israel and the U.S. are considering the removal of PA Chairman Yasser Arafat through the disengagement plan. The Israeli officials believe the plan is welcomed by the young PA leadership, and opposed by Arafat.

All media reported that Wednesday three Gazan activists from the Hamas military wing who were apparently trying to gather intelligence in the Netzarim area were killed when an IDF helicopter fired a missile at their car. Maariv and Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli security officials as saying that the man responsible for dispatching a female suicide bomber to the Erez crossing in mid-January was among them. The police declared the highest state of alert throughout the entire country in advance of the Purim holiday, which will take place during the weekend. Ha'aretz cited a report by the European Institute for Research on the Middle East that Britain and other European states gave the Palestinians more than 20 million euros (around USD 25 million) to pay for legal and information consultation. [NB: The institute is an independent, non-governmental organization created to examine relations between the EU and the Middle East.] Ha'aretz also quoted British and Palestinian sources as saying that Britain has agreed to finance new operation centers for the PA police in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The newspaper quoted Israeli defense sources as saying that the British aid aims to strengthen the Palestinian police in the territories and is part of its support for Palestinian bodies acting against terrorist organizations.

Channel 2-TV reported Wednesday that Arafat has dispatched a Palestinian official to explore the possibility of being buried on the Temple Mount, close to the graves of the Hussein family to which he belongs. The station reported that the extremist Muslim Palestinian group Tahrir has strongly come out against the proposal.

All media reported that Wednesday the Haifa District Court sentenced three Israeli-Arab youths from Kafr Manda in the lower Galilee to jail terms of between 14 and 20 years for planning terrorist attacks in the north of the country. The intended attacks had not been carried out, but the judges said they took their gravity into account. This morning, Israel Radio and IDF Radio reported that the same court indicted two Israeli-Arab brothers for allegedly having been recruited by the Abu Moussa faction of Hizbullah, serving as couriers, and passing on training material and operational instructions to members of the Tanzim-Fatah infrastructure in Jenin.

All media reported that Wednesday Justice Dalia Dorner, the outgoing head of the Central Elections Committee, ruled that the next general elections should be held in November 2007 and not in 2006. She admitted that her verdict is "but a corridor" to an expected High Court of Justice decision.

Yediot reported that the water-supply agreement with Turkey will be signed today. The accord stipulates that Turkey will sell 375 million cubic meters of water to Israel over a 20-year period.

Ha'aretz and Yediot quoted an Immigration Police official as saying that his organization will soon begin using a computerized system to compile information used to identify and track foreign workers in Israel.

Yediot reported that Wednesday the Prime Minister's Office approved a "grandiose" plan to transfer its offices and the prime minister's official residence to a new "White House-style" compound that should be completed by 2009.

A poll conducted by Maariv/New Wave found that: -47 percent of Israelis believe that Sharon knew about the Tenenbaum-Cohen family connection; 26 percent believe that Sharon was unaware of it; 27 percent are undecided.

-42 percent believe that the fact that Sharon had a business connection with Tenenbaum's family influenced his decision to carry out the prisoner exchange; 41 percent do not believe so; 17 percent are undecided.

-43 percent of respondents believe that Sharon should not resign if he knew about the Tenenbaum-Cohen connection; 42 percent believe that Sharon should resign in that case; 15 percent are undecided.

1. Performance of PM Sharon's Government:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The government failed in its duty.... A comprehensive investigation is needed."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Now, when [Sharon] has turned against [the settlers] and they use the same methods against him, he is the last one who should complain."

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Dankner wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Today the public feels like a sucker.... But the public at large continues, at this stage, to believe that there is no alternative to Ariel Sharon yet."

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized: "In an atmosphere of heavy suspicion ... it behooves the Prime Minister to resign immediately."

Block Quotes:

I. "Test of Credibility and Judgment"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (March 4): "Prime Minister Ariel Sharon Wednesday denied that extraneous interests, including a special personal interest in Elchanan Tenenbaum, influenced him while he

was pressing the government to approve a deal to free hundreds of Palestinian and other prisoners for the return of Tenenbaum and the bodies of three soldiers killed when they were captured by Hizbullah.... The government failed in its duty as the supreme authority responsible for such decisions in the State of Israel, as a group of ministers with shared responsibility, and not the Prime Minister alone, or him and a handful of ministers alongside him, as in cases of war cabinets or emergencies requiring immediate decisions.... A comprehensive investigation is needed into the way information was handled, the staff work and the decision-making in the Tenenbaum affair. It would be best that the investigation not be conducted in a political framework, like the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, but in the skilled hands of the State Comptroller's Office and its branch for security matters."

II. "The Mountain and the Molehill"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 4): "Sharon came by this onslaught honestly. First, because he and his sons have made the two words 'I didn't know' into a family creed. It is hard to respect the innocence of a person who doesn't know what is the source of millions of dollars that go in and out of his house. Now, when it appears, ostensibly, that Sharon truly didn't know, many find it hard to believe him. The main political factor today undermining Sharon's credibility is the settlers. They have an existential interest in sabotaging his unilateral withdrawal plan. Their agents will do anything -- except for using weapons -- to topple him. If they can stick him with a dubious tie to Tenenbaum, they would consider this to be a great success. This too Sharon came by honestly. For years he built them up -- and they him. He knows their tricks very well: some of them he invented himself. Now, when he has turned against them and they use the same methods against him, he is the last one who should complain."

III. "Is It Reasonable?"

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Dankner wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (March 4): "It is ... no secret that the owners of this paper are among Sharon's close friends. In spite of this, the facts were reported because of their public importance and nothing could be more honorable, since professional and journalistic considerations are our only guide.... Ultimately, this story is a story of trust, of probability and of a whirlwind in which facts and feelings spin together. This is also a question of the public's feelings. In the 2001 elections, the public sent Ehud Barak home because it felt like a sucker upon seeing the Palestinians getting proposals that were far-reaching in their generosity from the prime minister and getting the Intifada in return. Today the public feels like a sucker as more repulsive details emerge on redeemed captive and controversial Elchanan Tenenbaum. But the public at large continues, at this stage, to believe that there is no alternative to Ariel Sharon yet and that is why some Israelis will continue not to believe Sharon but will continue to support him as long as there is no other option."

IV. "Government Under a Heavy Cloud of Suspicion"

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized (March 4): "No one can believe that the acquaintance between the Sharon and the Cohen-Tenenbaum families did not come up in the course of the negotiations for the release of the prisoners from Hizbullah captivity.... In an atmosphere of heavy suspicion about criminal behavior by the Prime Minister; in an atmosphere of heavy suspicion that he is being blackmailed by the Austrian government; in an atmosphere of heavy suspicion about the prisoner exchange deal that was secured under foul smelling circumstances -- it behooves the Prime Minister to resign immediately. His conduct regarding the unilateral disengagement, which will entail the expulsion of the Jews from Katif [in the Gaza Strip], also appears to be insane when one considers the Prime Minister's actions from the past both distant and near. Does this not oblige the coalition to suspect that in this case too something foul, something very foul is lying in concealment but is destined yet to be exposed?"

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Internationalizing the solution would free the sides from conflict with their respective national ethos.... The current international constellation offers Israel a ripe moment for just such an arrangement, with the world being run by a single friendly superpower."

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "An Israeli unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip must be a complete and absolute severance from this piece of land, a divorce."

Foreign News Editor Shmuel Rosner wrote on page one of Ha'aretz: "Kerry has always promised a special envoy for the peace process. In fact, this is his only practical promise [in this domain], and even that idea has developed in contradictory directions."

Block Quotes:

I. "It's Time to Internationalize the Solution"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 4): "Sharon wants to give up the ethos of 'settlement throughout all of the Land of Israel' to buy some quiet. But like Ehud Barak, he'll find out that the Palestinians don't give up something for nothing.... Internationalizing the solution would free the sides from conflict with their respective national ethos. In their name, the superpowers would give up 'the right of return' and 'Judea and Samaria' and would also have to give up their own contribution to fanning the flames of the conflict.... The current international constellation offers Israel a ripe moment for just such an arrangement, with the world being run by a single friendly superpower. Thus, perhaps, the conclusions of the [1937] Peel Commission can be fulfilled, in which even if the partition does not offer the Jews and Arabs 'all they want, it offers each what it wants most, namely freedom and security.'"

II. "Cut Off From Gaza Completely"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in Yediot Aharonot (March 4): "The army correctly argues that withdrawing from Philadelphia [the narrow route along the Gaza/Egyptian border] will make it possible to smuggle in Katyusha rockets that will threaten Ashkelon. But the army also knows that weapon smuggling will not stop in any case, that this road by itself cannot put a stop to the phenomenon.... Israel's supreme interest in withdrawing from the Philadelphia road is evident by Egypt's panicky reaction to the idea. The Egyptians know that the moment that the IDF leaves the road and no longer is a buffer between them and the Palestinians, this hot potato will fall into their laps. Just like before 1967, they will bear all the responsibility, toward Israel, toward the U.S. and toward the entire world if there is terror from Gaza at Israel using weapons smuggled from Egypt.... An Israeli unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip must be a complete and absolute severance from this piece of land, a divorce. The border with Gaza must be completely closed: no workers, no factories, no shared industrial zones, no civilian responsibility and no settlements. Those who will have to face the Gaza Strip will be their Arab brothers, and that way, finally, the Arab world can do its part in contributing to the welfare and livelihood of the Palestinians, the people it has been so concerned about for the last three and a half years. Who can object to such an absolute detachment by Israel? After all, this is what the Palestinians, the Egyptians and the world have been demanding for decades."

III. "Kerry and Israel: Like Clinton, But Less Emotionally"

Foreign News Editor Shmuel Rosner wrote on page one of Ha'aretz (March 4): "John Kerry is no big fan of Sharon.... But ... a few weeks ago ... he unhesitatingly said: 'I believe that Sharon is prepared to make peace'.... Kerry also said that he understood the reasons for building the separation 'fence'. He sounded like someone who believes that the U.S. shouldn't oppose its erection -- provided its route more or less coincides with the Green Line.... His adversaries say that he is fickle and that he adapts himself to fads. His supporters claim that he recognizes that the world is complex.... His principal

assertion, which he has reiterated many times, is that the administration should demonstrate greater involvement in efforts to resolve the conflict.... There is no agreement about this claim among U.S. experts and diplomats.... Kerry has always promised a special envoy for the peace process. In fact, this is his only practical promise [in this domain], and even that idea has developed in contradictory directions."

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